Faith and Awareness in Young Female Celebrity Life Writing: The Memoirs of Lena Dunham, Malala Yousafzai, and Katie Davis

A Senior Honors Project Presented to the Faculty of the Department of English,

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For Bachelor of English with Honors

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April 23, 2017

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Acknowledgements

This project is the culmination of the time and effort many have invested in my personal and educational growth, and I am grateful to the following who helped me reach this milestone.

I want to thank God for His love and strength throughout the years.

I want to thank my mom, Bernie Smith, for her support and selfless giving. I want to thank my dad, Edward Smith, for his patience and hard work that have enabled me to receive an excellent education from the start of my schooling. I want to thank my sister Briana Smith for her company in our many experiences together.

I want to thank my project mentor Dr. Howes, who has invested time and energy into seeing this project through despite the challenges of communicating long distance and the time constraints I inadvertently imposed on the project. I am grateful for his dedication to improving my writing when I was a student in his English 311 class, and now for his patience and continued commitment to helping me complete the project. I could not have completed it without his mentorship.

I want to thank my committee members Dr. Zuern and Dr. Caron for their willingness to advise me as members on my committee.

I want to thank the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa English Department for the excellent care and attention professors and staff showed me over my college career. Thank you for equipping me with the skills needed to complete an Honor’s thesis.

I want to thank the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Honors Program for offering me the research-intensive coursework that equipped me to complete this project. I thank Dr. Gonzalez for her leadership in the preparation of this project, and I thank Dr. Siobhán Ní Dhonacha for her genuine care and advice.

Abstract

This project is a critical analysis of the life writing of young, contemporary women focusing on the spiritual aspect of their writing aiming to study the spiritual beliefs and purpose behind including this aspect of their life in an autobiography. of these young women through their published autobiographical works.

This paper focuses on studying the autobiographies of three young, contemporary, celebrity women- Lena Dunham (*Not That Kind of Girl*), Malala Yousafzai (*I Am Malala),* and Katie Davis (*Kisses from Katie*). Lena Dunham is a controversial entertainer, while Malala and Katie Davis are conservative, religious women, although Malala is Muslim and Davis is Christian. Based on their writings about their life, analysis is done to compare and contrast the influences and reasons behind their beliefs, and the way they act on them, according to their memoirs. In addition, theoretical framework on autobiography and life writing is studied in order to situate the autobiographies in both history and modern critics in order to determine the intent of each writer and the purpose behind writing the memoir within their respective autobiography.

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Introduction: Female Autobiography and Modern Celebrities

There is long history of autobiographical works by women, whether it be through journals, or through published historical accounts of experience (Smith and Watson, 6). Through the years, women used life writing as a means to record thoughts and events that otherwise unique to their experience as females. In fact, their gender is the reason "autobiography has been employed by many women writers to write themselves into history" (Smith and Watson, 5). Autobiography provided women a space for self-representation that rarely existed in the public sphere. Even when such narratives were published, there was a history of "othering" women's writing that has often led to their works being devalued in comparison to those of men simply because of the gender of the author (Smith and Watson, 8).

This gendering of writing, and autobiography in particular, manifests itself in the specific ways that female writers think and choose to write about themselves. One of the qualities of female self-representation is the seemingly inherent and unavoidable recognition of the writer's identity as a woman, and her awareness of how this affects the way her work is received. As Susan Stanford Friedman puts it, a woman "is always aware of how she is being defined as woman, that is, as a member of a group whose identity has been defined by the dominant male culture" (75). As a result, Friedman argues, a woman does not only write as an individual but as a member of the collective group of "Women" (76). It is therefore important and necessary to approach women's writing with this shared sense in mind, which is "an aspect of identity that exists in tension with a sense of their own uniqueness" (Smith and Watson, 79).

The self-awareness of writing from the perspective not only of an individual woman but as a member of the collective identity of female is apparent in the life writing of celebrities Lena

Dunham, Malala Yousafzai, and Katie Davis. While wildly diverse in personal histories and values, each woman is well-known within a very large community, and their controversial lives, and even their notoriety, is one of the main reasons they wrote their autobiographical works. This is a recent and major trend in publishing and celebrity culture, as "publishers have discovered that recovering and publishing women's life stories is a profitable enterprise" (Smith and Watson, 5). In the cases of Dunham, Yousafzai, and Davis, people already had strong opinions about and responses to each of their lives before their memoirs were written. As a result, they are even more self-aware of the effect their work could have on their public reputation and their present and future plans.

Because these women are already familiar with how others seek to celebrate, exploit, or undermine them as celebrities, their autobiographies insist on exercising control over their own lives and images. Each is aware that a form of "branding" follows them, a result of a mixture of their deliberate actions and the discourse that surrounds them that may or may not accurately represent their beliefs or motives. This too is influenced by their gender. Each young woman is partly a product of labeling, for as Tyler and Bennett explain, "celebrity is restricted to those who can display femininities of highly specific kinds. Like the concomitant forms of femininity, the forms of celebrity available to women are regulated and relentlessly disciplined" (381). As a result of this regulation, Dunham, Malala, and Davis are all highly aware of the constructed narratives surrounding them as celebrities, and they all respond in their memoirs to these narratives, and to those who both support and condemn them.

The follow brief accounts of the backgrounds of these women also introduce the reception and rhetoric surrounding them, and therefore their perceived brand when they began to produce their autobiographies. Lena Dunham's controversial reputation is that of young "white

feminist" (Allen, n.p.). Though active beforehand as a film maker, she rose to fame in 2012 with the launching of her show *Girls*, which she writes, directs, and produces (Allen, n.p.) The show positions itself as about twenty-first century relatively affluent young white women in their twenties dealing with modern issues involving school, careers, and relationships (Allen, n.p.). Because of its explicit, often sexual nature, the show provokes strong reactions, and even attacks, because Dunham as a woman does not fit the aesthetic mold of the entertainment industry. Many condemn Dunham for the same reasons that many other people champion her—she takes *Girls* in bold directions, with a commitment to authenticity that often offends. Particularly controversial is Dunham's own nudity on her show. Some see this as a feminist declaration, others see it as an offense against women. Her memoir, *Not That Kind of Girl: A Young Woman Tells You What She's "Learned",* responds to several audiences by insisting that the purpose of her own self-exposure is to push back against the expectations of women in the entertainment industry, whether they involve body image, or the power dynamics between men and women.

Some critics also attack Dunham for her privilege as a white woman who comes from a wealthy background. For example, writer Kevin D. Williamson states in an article from the conservative magazine *National Review* that "The enormous affluence and indulgence of her upbringing did not sate her sundry hungers—for adoration, for intellectual respect that she has not earned, for the unsurpassable delight of moral preening—but instead amplified and intensified her sense of entitlement" (n.p.) Critics often point to Dunham's upbringing in a white Jewish household with successful artists as parents, living in a $6.25 million dollar Tribeca apartment (Williamson, n.p.). In response to these attacks, in her memoir, Dunham documents in detail her experiences as a women writer, actress, and producer to reject the notion that her success in the industry is simply the result of her background of wealth and connections. In fact,

she claims that her identity as a woman gave her little advantage throughout her career, negating any of the perceived privilege.

Dunham is famous for the honest, yet provocative comments she makes off-screen. In one case she stated she "held more sympathy for India's 'stray dogs' than she did for the 'poverty-stricken people'" (Allen, n.p.). More recently, she has come under attack for stating that she wished she had had an abortion (Ryan, n.p.). Clearly, Dunham does not conform to the standards many people demand of her as a celebrity and woman. In *Not That Kind of Girl*, she not only demonstrates her awareness of the responses her bold comments receive, but without apologizing, she defends her commitment to acting as what she considers is her authentic self. She accepts her branding as a "white feminist" and responds to both the critical and supportive narratives she provokes. Throughout the memoir, Dunham insists on the value of her perspective not just as a woman, but a woman who represents and stands up for the rights of other women to be valued as who they are. But because Dunham is so defiantly committed to living out her identity as a woman in the way she wants to, rather than the way her culture and society wants to dictate, she is, not surprisingly, a polarizing figure. She is clearly aware of the public's strong reactions in response to her behavior. In her memoir she addresses and often refuses to accept the different narratives constructed around her as a consequence of her celebrity. *Not That Kind of Girl* answers her critics, and her supporters, by remaining firm to her self-representation, but also explaining the reasons lying behind her controversial actions.

Malala Yousafzai demonstrates awareness of her branding as a "freed Muslim woman" by both playing to and counteracting the "oppressed Muslim woman" narrative so often imposed upon life writing of women from the global South. On October 9, 2012, the Taliban shot Malala on her way home from school in Pakistan. She was fifteen years old ("Malala Yousafzai -

Biographical", n.p.). This life-threatening experience became a world-wide news event, sparking controversy and focusing mass attention on the lives of women in Pakistan and in the Middle East. Consequently, Malala came to symbolize "a call for justice for girls in the global South" (Khoja-Moolji, 539). And yet, while supporters of Malala may strongly believe they are in the right in admiring and supporting her as part of combatting perceived injustice, a side effect of this support is often helping to perpetuate unfair and destructive binaries of East vs West, with Malala serving as an example of someone now "freed" from her Muslim community, in which Muslim men are oppressors, and women are oppressed (Khoja-Moolji, 539). Theorist Gillian Whitlock describes autobiography as a "soft weapon" due to how it can be used to both liberate and constrain its author based on the context of its use (3). In her memoir *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, cowritten with journalist Christina Lamb, Malala shows her own awareness of this oppression and freedom narrative, and the beliefs and prejudices it can produce.

The narrative surrounding the trope of the oppressed Muslim woman is an example of what writer Chimamanda Adichie calls "the danger of the single story." In a 2009 TED Talk, she warns against the belief in a stereotype about a group of people based on the presentation of a single narrative of someone in the group. Or as Adichie states in her speech, "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (Adichie). In *I Am Malala*, Malala make clear she is aware of the dangers of the single story of an oppressed Muslim woman by recording her own horrific personal experience while simultaneously deconstructing the myths and stereotypes that have come to surround it. She gives examples of autonomous women to illustrate that there is agency for women within her community. She also clearly identifies how her culture manages and exploits women without

critiquing or abandoning those customs and norms of her community that she obviously values. She also foregrounds her father throughout the memoir as not only a major influence on her life, but also as a model of a Muslim man who respects and advocates for the rights of women. In particular, she talks about his love of schooling, and his belief in education for men and women, as a significant reason for why she is an advocate for the same cause today.

A characteristic of the surrounding single story of oppressed Muslim women is the demonizing of Islam, with many in the West equating the Taliban's actions against Malala as representative of all Muslim believers. In her memoir Malala again shows awareness of this assumption, and strategically defends her faith by distinguishing her own beliefs and those of the Muslim community in Swat Valley from the those of the Taliban. She points to profound differences between the Taliban's interpretation of the Quran and her own, remaining uncompromisingly a Muslim while also insisting that the Taliban members are the outliers, or even heretics. *I Am Malala* therefore displays her awareness of the Western single narrative about her life, and at times directly engages with this narrative to create awareness and support for her education advocacy. But Malala also shows how the single narrative of universally oppressed Muslim women with no access to education is in fact false, and that such a narrative itself does a kind of violence to her own culture and faith, and more generally, to women's actual stories from the global South.

Although not as well-known as Malala Yousafzai or Lena Dunham, Katie Davis is a Christian missionary to Uganda who in her *New York Times* Bestseller list memoir *Kisses from Katie: A Story of Relentless Love and Redemption* also plays to her previous branding as a "saint." Traveling to Uganda in 2006 at the age of eighteen to be a schoolteacher, Davis found the poverty too great to ignore, and founded Azalama Ministries, a non-profit organization

dedicated to providing basic care and education to Uganda's many orphans. Through her blog, which bore the same title as her memoir, she gained a great deal of attention within the American Christian faith community through her account of serving as a mother to thirteen Ugandan children (Katie's Story", n.p.). In the memoir, Davis recounts the origins of her desire to become a missionary, her journey to Uganda, and ultimately her fostering of thirteen young women as her own children. Her Christian faith is reiterated constantly in her narrative.

Davis is distinctive not only for her exceptionally early foster motherhood, but for her drive to become a missionary and start a nonprofit organization in the volatile country of Uganda. The country has a long and often troubled history with Christianity, with many past and current missionaries accused of forming close political ties to enact their own controversial policies. As a foreigner in Uganda and as a Christian missionary at that, Davis is a controversial figure. An evangelist who carries out her Christian work in a country where religion is highly politicized, by pursuing this initiative as very young single (at the time) woman, she is also challenging the traditions of her own strongly patriarchal faith. Despite these challenges, Davis bears witness to her own beliefs while navigating extreme tensions as a foreigner in Uganda, and resistance to her mission from her own religious family. Throughout *Kisses from Katie*, Davis anticipates and responds to her critics and supporters inside and outside of her Christian community, presenting herself as an example of how a woman can thrive as a person of faith, and as a missionary in the country of Uganda.

Kisses from Katie is a recent example of a long tradition of female autobiographies presented as spiritual narratives. The foundations of female life writing were set by women such as Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish, and Anne Bradstreet, whose pious yet strong narratives set standards for female life writing that have their influence even today.

Katie Davis follows Julian and Kempe, who "in the mystical tradition of personal dialogue with a divine being who is Creator, Father, and Lover, discover and reveal themselves in discovering and revealing the Other" (Mason, 321). Throughout *Kisses from Katie*, Davis uses her relationship with God to justify and promote not only her humanitarian work, but also to defy any condemnation of her experience as a lone missionary woman serving abroad. Clearly aware that supporters as well as critics come from her faith community, Davis purposefully draws upon the paradigms of female spiritual autobiography to defend herself against those in her own Christian community who may not think it appropriate that as a young single woman, she is a missionary in the volatile and therefore dangerous country of Uganda.

I chose to study Lena Dunham's, Malala Yousafzai's, and Katie Davis' memoirs together precisely because of the extreme diversity of their backgrounds and beliefs, despite their shared status as contemporary, young woman celebrities. Though starkly different in heritage, vocation, and values, all three respond in their memoirs to the experience of becoming a target as a result of their gender. This is the common fate for women who have sought to share their experiences. As critic Leigh Gilmore writes, "Shaming, victim blaming, discrediting, and denunciation attach to women's testimony so predictably, and are so regularly associated with it, that these negative affects function as prolepsis: they are a threat that prevents women from testifying" (7). As my brief summaries of the lives of Dunham, Malala, and Davis point out, not only have all three experienced the type of attacks Gilmore mentions, but they also have come to expect them. In their memoirs, each young woman shows an acute awareness of the critiques that accompany her branding as a celebrity, and also of the need to defend herself for actions that in most cases would raise few objections if her gender was male.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note that it has only been within the last thirty years that women's autobiographical writing was taken seriously enough to be studied academically (4). More generally, virtually all women are conscious of the fact that their experiences and stories are often devalued when in the presence of their male counterparts, and this awareness affects how they write about themselves not only as individuals but as members of the communities of women (Friedman, 75). Lena Dunham, Malala Yousafzai, and Katie Davis are vastly different individuals, but equally exceptional in their determination to remain true to their beliefs, and to act on them, however incendiary, offensive, or morally wrong others might judge them to be. Each of their autobiographical works tells the story of how they came to do the subversive work that they have, how they now participate in forms of self-branding, and how they have responded to the attacks that have followed. Their books seek to address, explain, and defend their actions to critics and supporters alike. The value in studying female autobiography by young female celebrities is that it not only allows us to discover women who successfully navigate the pushback their gender automatically subjects them to, but more specifically, to discover the rhetorical strategies adopted by such women who feel the need to assert the value of sharing the narratives that define their lives.

Chapter 1

Lena Dunham: *I'm Not that Kind of Girl*

Mentioning Lena Dunham's name sparks incendiary reactions from both those who love and hate her. At the age of twenty-five Dunham became widely recognized as the writer, director, and star of her boundary-breaking television show *Girls*. She became a polarizing figure in part because of her unabashed commitment to authenticity, and her confidence in her self-representation as a woman both in and out of her art. Most notably, the explicit nature of her sexuality displayed on *Girls* has led her to both be championed as a feminist and criticized for the exhibitionist nature of her art.

Dunham discusses her controversial actions in her autobiography *Not That Kind of Girl: A Young Woman Tells You What She's "Learned"* (2014). This book follows in the tradition of autobiographies from female comedians such as Tina Fey, Chelsea Handler, Mindy Kaling, Amy Schumer, and Margaret Cho, who tell their stories in a playful, sardonic manner while also making more serious points regarding their treatment as women. Dunham's book chronicles her upbringing and growth into her identity as a woman in the private and professional arenas. She describes her successes and her vulnerabilities, emphasizing the challenges she and many other women face when trying to be taken seriously as a female in the arts. The memoir itself is more of an eclectic collection of essays that together tell a coming of age story for the secular modern women, very much following the pattern and marketing of autobiographies written by female celebrity comedians after rising to fame.

Because of her especially bold career decisions, Dunham is a highly divisive figure, most likely attracting as many enthusiastic devotees of her work and persona as harsh vilifiers at the other end of the spectrum. In *Not That Kind of Girl*, she often responds to her critics directly,

whether about something so specific as why she chooses to do nude sex scenes, or so general as defending her right to tell through her art many of her experiences as a woman. The book appeared two years after the premiere of *Girls,* and is clearly responding to the fans and haters of the show alike. Throughout *Not That Kind of Girl*, Dunham remains strongly assertive of who she is as a woman, even though her critics attack her most harshly for the consequences of this commitment to authenticity.

Polarizing Presence

Lena Dunham is clearly committed to disclosure, and because she embodies having no filter, the backlash often results from her candid statements made in the public sphere. Dunham does not however claim that her oftentimes offensive statements were misunderstood or unintended. In fact, throughout *Not That Kind of Girl,* Dunham shows she was aware of the affect her comments have on others, and even pokes fun at how often her impudent or apparently thoughtless actions were designed to annoy her critics by insisting on speaking her mind as a way to declare ownership and validation of her thoughts.

Take for example the chapter "13 Things I've Learned Are Not Okay to Say to Friends." Here for comic effect, Dunham lists statements she has made that were blatantly rude, and even morally offensive. Some of the most bewildering statements include "Holocaust, eating disorder. Same difference" or "But it's different because I actually have a dad" (Dunham, 145-146) The other eleven are similarly tactless. By providing this chapter in *Not That Kind of Girl,* Dunham shows that she not only recognizes that she often takes her commitment to authenticity and her right to act without societal constraint to a level that is troubling to others, but also that the responses she receives, and the criticism she draws, are desirable, because then the people who oppose women's rights to self-determination are themselves exposed.

The chapter is self-deprecating in the sense that Dunham has a playful or ironic attitude toward these supposed statements. But she does not apologize for them, or claim that they have no consequences. Instead, she insists that her commitment to speaking her mind and remaining authentic means that she will hurt and offend others along the way, and that in many instances, she wants them to be hurt and offended. She therefore addresses her critics in a roundabout way, showing them that she has much more self-awareness and purpose in her words and actions than the privileged ignorance so often ascribed to her. She highlights this awareness, and the kinds of responses she often receives for her controversial actions, to demonstrate that her work serves a purpose beyond self-expression. Her bold and controversial statements and her career moves are part of an aggressive strategy to anger and ridicule those who oppose her self-expression and her complete ownership of her identity as a woman.

Dunham specifically rebels against the conventions of how women are represented and treated by the entertainment industry. Her work on *Girls* exposes and subverts many of the attitudes Hollywood holds toward women, whether they concern how they appear before the camera, or how they should not be involved in the decision-making processes of production. Dunham has come under fire for *Girls*, provoking many to say her privileged background has led to her success, allowed her to remain ignorant, and also made ridiculous any of her complaints about how women are treated (Williamson, n.p.). Others champion her work and boldness as a step forward for women in terms of agency. Dunham is pushing back against longstanding boundaries often set for women, especially in the arts (Guest, n.p.). In *Not that Kind of Girl*, Dunham therefore doesn't seek merely to defend herself, but to explain herself and her motivations so that readers understand that she never intends to hurt, slander, or degrade women. Rather, she sees her work as in part an effort to encourage women to be free to be themselves,

instead of what people tell them they have to be, by demonstrating her own commitment to authenticity and self-expression, regardless of critics, or their motivations.

Equality in the Arts

One of the most common attacks on Lena Dunham is that she is the embodiment of privilege because she is white and comes from an affluent family. These critics argue that this background is not only responsible for her apparently effortless rise to fame, but also protects her from feeling any consequences of her very public mishaps, including wearing a faux hijab on Instagram, or casting people of color exclusively as nannies or bellhops on the first season of *Girls* (Allen, n.p.). Money and contacts have allowed her to be a successful writer, director, and actress, and the same advantages shield her from being harmed by her often brash actions (Allen, n.p). While Dunham never explicitly calls out those who attack or dismiss her because of her perceived privilege, in her autobiography, she anticipates and implicitly responds to this judgement. She does this by detailing the opposition she has had to deal with in the entertainment industry due to her female gender.

She confesses that the challenges she has faced as a woman have led to insecurity and self-doubt in her personal and personal life. "I have been envious of male characteristics, if not the men themselves," Dunham states:

> I'm jealous of the ease with which they seem to inhabit their professional pursuits: the lack of apologizing, of bending over backward to make sure the people around them are comfortable with what they're trying to do. The fact that they are so often free of the people-pleasing instincts I have considered to be a curse of my female existence. (100)

Dunham's jealousy is of course ironic. She does not admire or respect someone for having no ability to please people; she instead is commenting on how some things would be so much easier

if you never had to consider other people. In her experience, men can strive professionally and generally be themselves without endlessly worrying of what others may think. This option is something women generally do not have, including even someone like Dunham, with her privileged background. In her autobiography, she records her own fair share of adversity in the entertainment industry because of her gender. She describes her experiences of men in Hollywood treating her merely as the body that she displays on screen, with no acknowledgement of her artistic talent or achievement.

This treatment is no surprise. Hollywood has a long and famous history of undermining and trivializing women both in on-and-off screen roles. While women are present in movies, and movies can even be made *about* them, their representations are often one-dimensional and confined to serving in a supporting role to a male lead (Ziesler, 38). In *Not That Kind of Girl* Dunham adds her own quirky humor to her accounts of the entertainment industry's treatment of women. Take for instance her claim that "women in Hollywood were treated like the paper thingies that protect glasses in hotel bathrooms-- necessary but infinitely disposable" (197). Dunham describes her personal experiences with men who devalue her art to expose the gender bias in Hollywood, and to assert her integrity and validity as an artist who happens to create from the perspective of a woman.

In the memoir she describes her interactions with the "Sunshine Stealers" to illustrate the condescension she deals with as a "girl." According to Dunham, the Sunshine Stealers are "men who have been at it a little too long, who are tired of the ride but can't get off. They're looking for some new form of energy, of approval. It's linked with sex, but it's not the same" (199). Pre-occupied by their own self-importance, these men belittle her by and other women by ignoring their potential to create, seeing them only as "silly" and "no threat" (201). Dunham states:

> As hard as we have worked and as far as we have come, there are still so many forces conspiring to tell women that our concerns are petty, our opinions aren't needed, that we lack the gravitas necessary for our stories to matter. That personal writing by women is no more than an exercise in vanity and that we should appreciate this new world for women, sit down, and shut up. (xvi)

Dunham responds to the Sunshine Stealers, who fail to see women as anything other than potential admirers, conquests, or mates, by forcing herself to insist constantly and bravely on the importance of everyone's experience. "There is nothing gutsier to me than a person announcing that their story is one that deserves to be told," she writes, and "especially if that person is a woman (xvi)." Dunham puts her gutsiness at the forefront in *Not That Kind of Girl*, insisting on the importance of female narratives largely by telling them. Whether it be sharing her experience of losing her virginity, or describing the dynamics between her and other women, she not only describes events that many would rather not hear about, but also presents them through the lens of a female identity.

Exhibitionism

In her autobiography, Dunham pays special attention to those actions or qualities she is already most famous for: her supposed television exhibitionism, her body image, and her struggle to be taken seriously as a contemporary young female artist. "I get naked on TV. A lot," Dunham acknowledges in *Not That Kind of Girl*, and she has been appearing that way before the camera for a long time—in sex scenes in her early film *Tiny Furniture* as well as her acclaimed HBO television series *Girls* (99). Dunham's frequent nudity has attracted both supporters and critics alike. On one end of the spectrum, many women laud Dunham for her willingness to expose a body that does not meet the model standard usually imposed upon women in

entertainment. On the other end, many critique Dunham for her exhibitionism and the explicit nature of her portrayals of her sexuality. Dunham addresses both audiences in the chapter "Sex Scenes, Nude Scenes, and Publicly Sharing Your Body" of *Not That Kind of Girl*, where she explains what she sees as the purpose of her nudity.

Much of the criticism revolves around the perceived imperfections or "grossness" of her naked body. Neither waif-like, nor acceptably curvy like the Kardashians, Dunham nevertheless bares her body regularly on *Girls*. In a 2013 review, *New York Post* critic Linda Stasi notes that "It's not every day in the TV world of anorexic actresses with fake boobs that a woman with giant thighs, a sloppy backside and small breasts is compelled to show it all." Less approvingly, that same year radio host Howard Stern remarked that "I learned that this little fat chick writes the show and directs the show and that makes sense to me because she's such a camera hog that the other characters barely are on." He then claimed that having to watch Dunham's nude scenes was like "rape" (Levy, n.p.).

These comments are a small, but very representative sample of the massive response—pro, con, and in between—that Dunham has received for showing her naked body on *Girls*. In a chapter entitled "'Diet' Is a Four-Letter Word: How to Remain 10 Lbs. Overweight Eating Only Health Food," she confesses that she herself has struggled greatly to overcome the pressure that the Western ideal of a thin woman exerts. She prints excerpts from her 2010 journal that log what food she consumed, along with their estimated calorie counts. Notes such as "could have had more veggies" and "it's about more than the calories" follow each entry of what amounts to a food diary (89–90). At first, it seems like Dunham's point in the chapter is to show that she is preoccupied with losing weight and becoming thinner. The results she records for this period of dieting, however, subvert the societal message that such an obsession will lead to happiness by

attaining the female ideal weight. As she chronicles her earlier attempts to monitor her diet, Dunham also records the temporary and very negative effects such restrictions had on her physical and mental health. She restricts her food intake to around 1500 calories per day—her lowest was 1,093 calories. Soon, however, she is also recording a multitude of negative effects, such as diarrhea, fever, and acute colitis (92–95). "I FEEL LIKE TOTAL SHIT" (94), she frankly writes, and she also notes that even when a friend notices her weight loss, the reaction is not positive: "She thought it was illness but I know the truth of the matter" (96). In her last entry, Dunham logs 4,225 calories, writing that "I went totally nuts and ate all the things" (98).

By retelling in such detail her own experience with body image, shame, ideal-seeking, and dieting, Dunham implicitly answers those who criticize her for not being the body size typically represented in popular entertainment. To want her to become the entertainment standard size of a woman is to want her to be sick. As for her followers and fans, Dunham openly confesses to her own struggles with body image and insecurity so that they can recognize that even a very successful actress and celebrity deals with powerful social pressures. Simply by placing her own "imperfect" form before the camera, Dunham violates the convention of the "idealized female body," allowing viewers to see another person who is not representing a standard to strive for or compete against. Presenting a body bigger and less-toned than that of the "typical" actress or model also implicitly validates the many others watching whose bodies does not meet the "norm" portrayed in the entertainment industry either. By recording her dieting "failure," and also the potential health dangers of success, Dunham insists that not everyone can fit the body standard of a model-- and that's okay.

In *Not That Kind of Girl*, Dunham also explains that her nudity is simply one of her more extreme strategies for achieving authenticity in her work—and in particular, the authentic size of

many women's bodies. "Another frequently asked question is how I am 'brave' enough to reveal my body onscreen," she writes: "The subtext there is definitely how am I brave enough to reveal my imperfect body, since I doubt Blake Lively would be subject to the same line of inquiry" (105). Dunham recognizes that the charges of exhibitionism arise from her unabashed refusal to feel ashamed of, and therefore conceal, a body a few sizes larger than usually seen on-screen. She purposefully combats the cruel and hurtful standard of the "idealized female body" by presenting her own imperfect form to the camera, showing viewers that it is not being presented as a standard to strive for or compete against. Dunham writes that she is grateful to have a positive impact on anyone's body image, and gives an example of a young boy who told her that her nudity helped him to feel more comfortable with the way he looks (Dunham, 105). Dunham therefore answers those like Howard Stern who are repulsed by her larger frame by acknowledging that she is not model material, but stressing that her reasons for showing her body are not for the usual combination of titillation and exploitation, but in fact to attack precisely the norms of the entertainment industry that create those self-interested and bigoted expectations about what kinds of bodies should be seen.

Similar expectations are the target Dunham is aiming at by writing and filming explicit sex scenes for herself and other actors. In *Not That Kind of Girl*, she writes that the representations of sex usually appearing in visual and other media are romanticized and inauthentic to the experience itself. "The sex in television and movies had always rubbed me the wrong way," she writes, and claims that "these images of sex can also be destructive. Between porn and studio romantic comedies, we get the message loud and clear that we are doing it all wrong" (103). When given the chance to make a television show about the struggles of a twenty-something like herself, Dunham therefore committed to representing sex in ways that she felt

were more realistic. Her strategy for combatting the perfect bodies and staged actions in most sex scenes was the same as her strategy for attacking the unrealistic representations of women's bodies in entertainment: by remaining authentic to her own personal experiences, no matter how unappealing, distasteful, or downright ugly they might seem when judged by the familiar fantasy portrayals.

Dunham and White Feminism

Dunham's personal presentation on *Girls* as well as her highly significant role in all aspects of the production has led her to be championed by many feminists as a woman willing to break through social constraints on how a woman should look and act. For such critics, Dunham's on-camera nudity is an example of one aspect of feminist thought that sees women who choose to reveal their bodies, regardless of appearance, as promoting women empowerment (Guest, n.p.). A retaking of personal ownership results when "women seize control of the means of cultural production to create their own women-centered representations of sexuality" (Freedman, 271). Dunham certainly does this in *Girls*. Taking full advantage of her power as the show's writer, producer, and main actress, she counteract typical representations of female bodies in entertainment by displaying her body and "women-centered representations of sexuality," which she believes to be much more authentic to lived experience.

But not all critics, including feminist critics, believe that the display of the female body uplifts women. "Western feminists themselves do not always agree in their sexual politics," Freedman writes, "including the line between sexual victimization and sexual agency" (270). How much sexual agency women exercise in the fields of prostitution and pornography is a constant source of debate, and theorist Catharine MacKinnon bluntly states that "Sexual objectification is the primary process of the subjection of women" (Freedman, 270). Because

MacKinnon links the oppression of women directly to viewing the female body in a sexual light, her critique would include the nudity and sex scenes Dunham presents in *Girls*. In an article titled "A vogue for self-exposure has reduced feminism to naked navel-gazing," Rafia Zacharia also cautions against equating nudity with feminism. "We are now in a time where the avowal of nakedness (both physical and emotional) is key, where the publicly exposed woman is truly courageous," she writes, but concludes that "The line between titillation and transgression is a fine one and in a voyeuristic world that expects women to all be coquettish exhibitionists, titillation does feminists no favours" (n.p.). Zacharia here questions Dunham's feminist intentions, arguing that Dunham's on-screen nudity is not making a feminist statement because the exposure of a woman's body is what society demands anyway.

In *Not That Kind of Girl*, Dunham refutes the charge that nudity is always a form of subjection and exploitation of women by insisting that she has full ownership of her body and the decision of whether to display it. "Getting naked feels better some days than others," she writes, "But I do it because my boss tells me to. And my boss is me. When you're naked, it's nice to be in control" (105). Here, Dunham claims full responsibility for her representation on screen. She along pushes herself to become naked. Even more importantly, she is "in control" not only of herself, but of the circumstances she places herself within when nude. Because she has full sexual agency, she feels that she can make that point best by exerting it even in those situations that traditionally have been most exploitive. She fully recognizes that not every woman, or maybe hardly any woman, may have full power over this choice. But given her circumstances, her on-screen appearance demonstrates that she is not a subjected woman, but a woman under her own control. Supposed exhibitionism here does not contradict her claims of agency, but proves them.

Conclusion

Dunham is an exceptional example of a young woman asserting her right to be heard. From her nudity on *Girls* to the outlandish and even offensive statements she makes, Dunham has grown an audience of supporters and opponents for her willingness to remain outspoken and her refusal to compromise her statements or actions for fear of violating any social standard she considers oppressive or restrictive. In *Not That Kind of Girl* she remains true to her public persona, but also explains in some detail the larger motivations and purposes behind her career moves, and her firmness in remaining unabashedly herself. Throughout the memoir, she spends a great deal of time discussing her identity as a female and the challenges that come along with the gender. She continually asserts her right to be her "imperfect self," stressing that especially in the entertainment industry, this right is often withheld (Dunham, 105). Her memoir displays her awareness of the positive and negative responses others have to her often audacious decisions — responses that she has often deliberately provoked. Dunham responds to critics and supporters in much the same way—by not backing down from who she is but rather explaining the purpose behind each action, whether someone else finds it offensive or not. *Not That Kind of Girl* continues the work that *Girls* began of showing both men and women what it looks like to remain authentically and unapologetically oneself, even if some people do not like what they see.

Chapter 2:

Malala Yousafzai: *I Am Malala*

As a result of worldwide publicity after the Taliban shot her on the way home from school in October 2012, activist Malala Yousafzai has become the foremost example of the Western-friendly single story narrative of oppressed Muslim women as victims of Muslim male violence. A prominent advocate for women's education even before the Taliban shooting Malala wrote her memoir *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, co-written with journalist Christina Lam before, during, and after the incident. Like Lena Dunham, Malala also uses her memoir to respond to both her critics and supporters by revealing the complexity of her cultural and religious beliefs lying behind the single story narrative of oppressed women and dominant Muslim men that Western audiences tend to impose upon her.

Autobiography has been a powerful tool for perpetuating and resisting the "single story" dynamic that Chimamanda Adichie warns against. Certainly, *I Am Malala* falls neatly into the category of life writing from the East and global South, which has grown in publishing numbers and readership since the events of 9/11 carried out by terrorists in the name of Islam. In her book *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*, Gillian Whitlock notes that "Since 2002, a proliferation of life narratives from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran is produced for the mass market readerships in the West—the United States most specifically …" (7). Malala's memoir is part of this trend of global South life narratives, which is so strong that it is almost as if greater work is accomplished through the publishing of her book rather than its content. Whitlock testifies to the power of such life narratives by referring to examples of them as a "soft weapon." "Autobiography circulates as

a ‘soft weapon,’” she remarks, “It can personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard” (3).

But Whitlock also warns against the ever-present danger of autobiography falling into the status of Adichie’s single story:

> It is a ‘soft’ weapon because it is easily co-opted into propaganda. In modern democratic societies propaganda is frequently not the violent and coercive imposition of ideas but a careful manipulation of opinion and emotion in the public sphere and a management of information in the engineering of consent. Life narrative can be complicit in these processes. (3)

I Am Malala certainly resembles the many narratives published that conform to the single story of oppressed Muslim women. Clearly marketed for Western audiences, most obviously because it is in English, *I Am Malala* is also undeniably about a victimized but eventually freed Muslim woman, like other published accounts about Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Mukhtar Mai, and Irshad Manji (Khoja-Moolji, 539). And yet, even though many who will read *I Am Malala* may conclude that it is another example of a long-standing narrative of Islamic oppression and the freeing power of education, the co-authors actively seek to keep the story from offering nothing more than that (Khaja-Moolji, 539). This chapter will explore the variety of ways that *I Am Malala* acts and reacts in response to the events and discourse preceding it, as Malala addresses both her critics and supporters within Eastern and Western audiences.

Malala’s story, and more widely, any representation of Islam, takes place with a history of strict dichotomies between opposing sides. Whitlock refers to “long-established and intransigent antagonisms that, since 9/11 in particular, are often represented as a war between worlds: East and West, Muslim and Christian, traditional and modern” (5). These binaries shape

the single story of Islam in the West, and *I Am Malala* would seem to be a perfect candidate for reduplicating this story. S. Khoja-Moolji identifies the significant narrative of women in Islam that many see in Malala's story and other stories of women from the South as the oppression and abuse of Muslim women. Like Whitlock, Khoja-Moolji emphasizes the power of autobiography in such cases: "through first-person accounts and the languages of human rights, we learn about the abuses that women (mostly Muslim) experience in Asian and/or African countries at the hands of their brothers, fathers, and sons (also mostly Muslim)" (547). And Khoja-Moolji explicitly points to the "the strong narrative thread throughout *I Am Malala* that rearticulates the molar framing of Muslim women/girls as victims of brown/Muslim men" (547).

And indeed, given what happened to her, it is not surprising that many details in Malala's account present herself and other women as being oppressed by men. In Malala's community, women cannot go around town without a male relative, though even a young boy can be an acceptable accompaniment (26). Women need a man's permission to open a bank account. A woman accusing a man of rape would have to produce four male witnesses, or else the woman might be charged with adultery (31). A double standard is common: "for a girl to flirt with any man brings shame on the family, though it's all right for the man" (66). Domestic violence is common (21). Malala directly expresses her dissatisfaction with this state of affairs: "I am very proud to be a Pashtun, but sometimes I think our code of conduct has a lot to answer for, particularly where the treatment of women is concerned" (66). As examples, she mentions an instance when a father sold his ten-year-old daughter to an older man who already had a wife (66). She also criticizes the practice of swara, "by which a girl can be given to another tribe to resolve a feud" (67). Though in theory swara is illegal, it is still practiced, and Malala asks "Why should a girl's life be ruined to settle a dispute she had nothing to do with?" (67). Such content

leads Khoja-Moolji to conclude that "From the onset, then, the reader is enrolled in recalling the familiar script about the oppression of Muslim girls, and this becomes the framework within which the rest of the text is to be read" (547).

Malala also talks at length about the covering or veiling of women in her community, which Gillian Whitlock identifies as the visual symbol of the narrative of oppressed Muslim women. Islamic principles are given as the reason for this restrictive dress code for women in Malala's society. The name for such concealment is purdah, and it legislates how women cover themselves in public, or in the presence of men who are not relatives (Brittanica, n.p.). Like many other single story Muslim women life writers, Malala pays special attention to the burqa, a garment that covers all of the body and most of the face, leaving only the eyes partially exposed through a veil (BBC, n.p.). Malala remarks that "When you're very young, you love the burqa because it's great for dressing up. But when you are made to wear it, that's a different matter" (156). The results can be very unpleasant. "Wearing a burqa is like walking inside big fabric shuttlecock with only a grille to see through," she explains, "and on hot days it's like an oven" (67).

Not surprisingly, the practice of purdah, and in particular the wearing of a burqa, is fascinating to Western readers because it is such a strong visual symbol of the extreme double standard imposed on women, but not on men. Gillian Whitlock writes vividly about the power of burqa in autobiographies as a signifier of oppression:

> A surge of life writing about women under the repressive fundamentalist regimes in Afghanistan uses this dark and confined space of the burka to suggest the discipline of views imposed by the gender apartheid of the Taliban. From these recesses of the burka

> we can attend to experiences of loss, grief, and dispossession that until the very recent past were unheard and unseen in the West. (48)

Malala's critique of the burqa falls in line with the Western mode of viewing female covering "as the sign of Islamic women's oppression and subordination" (Whitlock, 48). Her cover picture also conforms to such expectations. She is not wearing a burqa, but rather a hijab, a head covering that leaves only a few centimeters of hair peeking through above her forehead. In Western terms, the hijab confirms her authenticity as a Muslim woman, but by covering less than a burqa, also allows her to be a symbol of resistance to complete subjugation. But of course, this supposed distinction is primarily a Western marketing device. Because veiling has come to mean Muslim "oppression," the hijab, which covers less than a burqa, makes Malala seem like a mediator between cultures, while also signifying that she must continue to rebel against Muslim oppression.

But while her narrative acknowledges and advances the binary between forces of oppression and freedom, she tends to see the terms of the opposition as two difference audiences, and she does not simply consider one to be good, and the other evil. Though including many details that confirm Muslim women, including herself, are being oppressed, Malala resists the single story stereotype that determines the reception of so many autobiographies emerging from the global South. To begin with, Malala emphatically rejects the idea that being oppressed therefore reduces women to the status of nothing but victims. She herself indicates that she does not agree with all the customs regarding women and believes there is room to improve. But she also implies that the covering of women is not purely an oppressive act, but a religious and cultural one with significance that lies beyond the reductive meaning it has come to have for her Western audiences (Yousafzai and Lam, 92). And she also includes many accounts of women

other than herself who successfully exert agency over themselves and others, often with the support of males. As Khoja-Moolji notes, unlike many other recently published texts, in *I Am Malala*, "we come to know Muslim women who shatter the trope of the victimized Muslim woman waiting for a savior" (549).

Malala deconstructs this trope in her narrative by revealing the complexity of gender roles in her society. She presents her mother and the school headmistress Maryam as examples. Though her mother is primarily seen in a domestic role, Malala presents this as a strength, rather than a weakness. She praises her mother's ability to manage the household, noting the absurdity of men who do not see this as a form of authority: "They don't think power is in the hands of the woman who takes care of everyone all day long, and gives birth to their children. In our house my mother managed everything because my father was so busy" (116). The culturally assigned domestic life of a woman is therefore not a sign of weakness, of strength. But Malala's memoir also takes note of women outside of the home sphere who have been very successful and influential in their careers. Many competent, strong, and accomplished women live in her country. The real problem is they are not allowed to be recognized for their accomplishments; to be effective, then, women must operate in conjunction with some male figure. "In Pakistan we had had a woman prime minister and in Islamabad I met those impressive working women," Malala explains, "yet the fact was that we were a country where almost all the women depend entirely on men. My headmistress Maryam was a strong educated woman, but in our society she could not live on her own and come to work. She had to be living with a husband, brother or parents" (218).

The prime minister and headmistress are therefore presented as examples of ambitious and effective women in Pakistan who are navigating their way toward greater autonomy,

contradicting the Western stereotype that all women in the East have little or no agency outside of their homes. Malala does not describe such women as total victims, but as individuals actively engaged in pushing the boundaries of societal gender roles. As Khoja-Mooliji explains, "These glimpses into the lives of Muslim women add complexity to, and work against, the narrative that reduces freedom to resistance against local practices." Malala therefore is directing our attention to examples of action: "Here, women seem to be working to establish their rights within local frameworks and against domestic and global patriarchies" (549). Malala acknowledges difficulties imposed by gender segregation and differences in expected gender roles. But women are not erased by these impositions, and find ways not only to live successfully within them, but actually look for ways to move beyond them. Malala shows us this by pointing to women who are successful outside of the expected domestic domain and working to "establish their rights within local frameworks" (549), even if they are not publicly recognized. In short, Malala's representation of herself and women in the East is less severe and despairing than the common single story account of oppression and maltreatment of Muslim women familiar to Western readers. This is not of course to claim that the women in Pakistan are fighting the same battles as say, Lena Dunham. But Malala's testimony does challenge and refute the one story narrative of Muslim women with no agency over their lives.

Men as Oppressors

Writing about the proliferation of Western narratives presenting women of the global South as oppressed by their own domineering men, Khoja-Moolji notes that it is "Here, through first-person accounts and the language of human rights, we learn about the abuses that women (mostly Muslim) experience in Asian and/or African countries at the hands of their brothers, fathers, and sons (also mostly Muslim)" (547). There is no question that *I Am Malala* records

many instances of extreme abuse by men, including Malala's own shooting. And yet, though there are longstanding structural and cultural inequalities between women and men in place in Malala's home in Swat Valley, she identifies the main source of abuse as a man named Fazlullah, who significantly is a part of the Taliban. He and his extremist group seek to increase the divisions and power inequities between men and women already in place. Much of the daily life of women in Malala's town did center around the home. But Fazlullah's teaching pushed this notion to the point of banning women from being in public at all, including the bazaar where they bought their domestic goods (118). It is also Fazlullah who advocates the banning of women's education.

The Taliban of course tightly links itself to Islam, and *I Am Malala* acknowledges this. But Malala rejects Fazlullah's claim that absoluteness of patriarchal power comes from Islam, and she distinguishes her own beliefs, and those of the people in her community, from the Taliban's interpretation of the Muslim holy book of the Quran. Fazlullah may call himself an "Islamic reformer" and "interpreter of the Quran" (112). He may preach his doctrine in the name of Islam. But in her memoir, Malala argues that what the Taliban enforces is at odds with her religion and her culture. Because Malala does not accept that the restrictions on women Fazlullah preaches are in the Quran, she therefore concludes he has no authority to impose such oppression. "Our people have become misguided," she explains, "They think their greatest concern is defending Islam and are being led astray by those like the Taliban who deliberately misinterpret the Quran" (223). Malala presents the Taliban's highly sexist and even misogynist policies as an extreme distortion of the gender roles already in place in her society. When women are banned from going out from their home at all, as opposed to the previous custom of having to be with a male family member, Malala concludes that this is no longer Islamic. In fact, she goes

much further: “Nowhere is it written in the Quran that a woman should be dependent on a man. The word has not come down from the heavens to tell us that every woman should listen to a man” (219). The argument is clear. While Fazlullah and the Taliban claim to share the same faith, Malala and her community are the true representatives of Islam. The extreme forces are twisting the words of the faith to justify their cruel policies, which have no foundation in Islam.

Malala reinforces this argument by describing how the Taliban’s imposition of a completely different set of rules from Islam extends well beyond controlling women. The Taliban mandated men grow beards, putting barbers out of business. DVDs and television were also banned (124), and “only the radio was allowed, and all music except for Taliban songs was declared *haram*” (114). In short, “It seemed like the Taliban didn’t want us to do anything” (124), with the “us” including men. Unlike the dominant single story Western narrative, then, where the Taliban is often assumed to represent all Muslim men, Malala’s memoir insists that the Taliban is an extreme outside anti-Islamic group that does not share what most people of her Islamic faith and country believe. In other words, men who share her religion and home community do not oppress women as the Taliban does.

The greatest evidence Malala presents against the narrative of the male Muslim oppressor is her own father, who consistently advocated for equal education of men and women, and even starting several co-ed schools (41). Unlike some men in her community, he is never violent to her mother (Yousafzai and Lamb, 21). And when the Taliban came to Swat Valley and began imposing their restrictive rules against men and women alike, he was one of the few to speak out against their unjust policies, and to continue promoting education for both men and women, despite danger of opposing such violent figures (114). Perhaps the strongest expression of Malala’s opinions about the oppressiveness of Muslim men therefore appears on the back cover

of *I Am Malala*. There in a photograph she gazes fondly at her father, who has his arms wrapped around her and is smiling. Here is a Muslim man from the global South who heavily influenced Malala to do the advocacy work she is doing today. His existence contradicts and refutes the single story of Muslim men as persecutors of women.

In fact, the sincerity and complexity of Malala's faith is an essential part of her history that prevents it from fitting totally into the Western one story narrative. Malala announces that "I am proud that our country was created as the world's first Muslim homeland, but we still don't agree on what this means" (91). Such contradictions paradoxically make the argument that her own story, and her own cultural and religious beliefs, are just as nuanced and challenging as those of her Western readers. Malala and her deadly opponents all claim a belief in Islam, but their differences in interpretation of their faith, and especially in regards to the Quran, lead to differences in how they live as Muslims. Further, while religious disagreements exist within her own community, as a whole her people do not share the opinions and values of the Taliban.

Perhaps Malala's most powerful refutation of the single story Muslim oppression narrative is how she willingly puts her trust in Allah even after members of the Taliban, who claim to act in the name of Islam, shoot her. Malala retains a strong faith in Allah, and credits Him for her survival. "Allah had blessed me with a new life" (275), she declares, and she even praises him for sending her to the West: "I thank Allah for the hardworking doctors, for my recovery and for sending us to this world where we may struggle for our survival" (301). Malala believes that Allah is the reason she is alive, which also contradicts the Taliban's claims to act on His behalf. If they were, then it was "God's will" for Malala to die. But she does not, and therefore He must want her to survive. Her belief and practice of the true Islam must be the

reason for her survival. As a result, her faith as a Muslim actually increases after her shooting, and so does her certainty that the Taliban does not represent the power or will of Allah.

Now a world famous activist, Malala sees her faith in Islam and her advocacy work as inseparable, because for her, being a Muslim requires advocating for women's equality and the right for women to be educated. "Today we all know education is our basic right," she explains, but "Not just in the West; Islam too has given us this right. Islam says every girl and every boy should go to school. In the Quran it is written, God wants us to have knowledge" (311–312).

Malala as Teacher to the World

Through her insistence on the complexity of the male/female dynamic within her culture and faith, Malala has drawn supporters and antagonized critics among Western and Eastern, Northern and Southern audiences. When she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, she was subsequently called the "pride of Pakistan" by Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (BBC, n.p.). And in her home of Swat Valley, where she was attacked, people gathered in celebration of Malala. At the same time, she has become an international representative of women's rights, and the face of advocacy for educating women. Throughout *I Am Malala*, Malala addresses all of these audiences.

The chances of misrepresentation and appropriation are still strong. As the abused heroic woman in the Western single story narrative, Malala runs the risk of being championed by the liberal left for rebelling and breaking free from the brutal misogynist society that oppresses her. There are real dangers to this interpretation of Malala's story. As Gillian Whitlock points out, "The logic of identity here approaches the relation between self and other as mirroring, which engenders an empathy with others insofar as one can see them as like oneself" (96). Whitlock warns readers of canonizing Malala as a feminist hero within a Western paradigm because this

can lead to valuing Malala most, and perhaps only, for aligning with her audience's understanding of what it means for women to struggle for equality. But Malala herself tries to prevent such mirroring by insisting on the importance of the cultural and religious aspects of the life that she was born into. Rather presenting her story as a struggle with eternally domineering and violent Muslim men, she presents a personal history during which at times the cultural and structural codes allow for gender differences to thrive, and at other times become sources of terrible acts and fierce resistance—a history not too remote from that of Western feminists in the United States. (Think for instance about about this year's women's march.) Regarding the events in Malala's autobiography, Khoja Mooliji writes that "it would be simplistic to read these actions axiomatically as moments of women's empowerment and agency; yet, they do signal the possibility of differently constituted lives where empowerment and agency may or may not look the same as that proposed by Western liberal feminists" (549). Malala therefore shares a struggle over gender inequality that women in the West can relate to, but cannot simply appropriate as "their" story.

Her resistance to such mirroring has not however prevented Malala from being criticized as pandering to the West by some in her own country. The binary of East versus West returns immediately when Pakistanis accuse her of allowing herself to be used by Westerners to fuel hostility to Islam and the Eastern world (AFJ, n.p.). Because of the controversy, her book launch had to be cancelled in her home of Peshawar (Khoja-Moolji, 548). Others mistakenly believe that *I Am Malala* claims that girls are not allowed to go to school anywhere in Pakistan, and have posted pictures to refute this error. Still others believe that Malala's account of the fight against the Taliban was dictated by the Americans, and does not represent the more nuanced understanding of the Taliban held by Pakistanis themselves. In *I Am Malala,* however, she makes

a point of raising and then refuting the claims she supposedly made. Throughout the memoir, for instance, Malala does attend school, and though some may disapprove, she continues to do so until she is shot. As for her attitude toward the Taliban, Malala acknowledges that these militant groups do have members from her region and her community, and furthermore, that they have in certain cases been beneficial. They were for example the only group to provide aid after a major earthquake. Though she distances herself from the Taliban because they have utterly different understandings of faith, or of how to interpret the Quran, she also notes that because of fear and uncertainty, many people willingly followed the Taliban and wanted them present in their village. There was no sudden violent overtaking; the movement grew up in her country.

Conclusion

To avoid falling into the "one story" narrative of oppressed women terrorized by Muslim men who are all members of the Taliban, such autobiographies need to be placed with historical and cultural contexts—by the readers, or even better, by the writer. Without some understanding of Malala's culture and the history of her country, it would undeniably be almost impossible not to read *I Am Malala* as another example of the one story narrative. And even though Malala tries to prevent her supporters and her critics from reading her memoir in this way, this narrative has become so ingrained in Western audiences that undoubtedly many will still read *I Am Malala* as support for Western ideals, as confirmation of many common notions about Malala's Muslim community, and as evidence of a fundamental opposition between West and East values. And admittedly, in her ongoing work, Malala may at times seem to confirm these notions to gain support for her advocacy for equality in education. But in her memoir, she clearly raises awareness of the dangers posed by opponents of freedom in education while carefully distancing her Muslim and Pashtun community from guilt. It is therefore the readers' responsibility to hold

back from jumping to conclusions about what Malala's community must be like, and to pay attention when she explains the complexity of her culture and faith. What is most important to note, however, is how *I Am Malala* invokes the oppressed Muslim woman single story negative to draw attention and support for her advocacy for education, while at the same time deconstructing it for readers careful enough to notice.

Chapter 3:

Katie Davis: *Kisses from Katie*

Although not as well-known as Lena Dunham or Malala Yousafzai, Katie Davis is a Evangelical missionary to Uganda relatively famous in Christian circles. Traveling there at the age of eighteen to be a schoolteacher, Davis found the poverty too great to ignore and established Azalama Ministries, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing basic care and education for Uganda's orphans. She attracted a substantial amount of attention for her role as adoptive mother to thirteen Ugandan children through her blog. Her memoir bears the same title. In *Kisses from Katie: A Story of Relentless Love and Redemption,* Davis recounts her life from her first desire to become a missionary, through her journey to Uganda, and up to the adoption of each of the thirteen girls as her own children. Throughout the narrative, Davis invokes her Christian faith constantly.

Davis is exceptional not only because of the huge adoptive family she takes on while still a very young woman, but also because of the strength of her calling to become a missionary, and her decision to set up a nonprofit organization to support her work in the volatile country of Uganda. The country has a long and often troubled history with Christianity, and more recently, many missionaries have been accused of taking advantage of close political ties to enact their own controversial policies. As a foreigner and an evangelical Christian missionary, Davis is a controversial figure simply by being a very young, single (at the time) woman who energetically conducts Christian work in a country where religion has often been politicized. In addition, some of these same qualities—her youth, her gender, her independence—are not necessarily highly valued within her own religious traditions. Nevertheless, Davis holds firm to her faith while pursuing her work, navigating tensions as a foreigner, and warding off critiques from home about

her status as a missionary. And like Lena Dunham and Malala Yousafzai, throughout her memoir, Katie Davis anticipates and responds to supporters and critics inside and outside of her Christian community, accounting for and defending her highly exceptional ability to thrive as a woman, mother, missionary, and person of faith in the country of Uganda.

Kisses from Katie is recent addition to a long line of female autobiographies whose origins as a genre stem from spiritual narratives. The pattern of such female devotional life writing was set by women such as Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish, and Anne Bradstreet, whose autobiographies established many of the rhetorical strategies still practiced by women memoirists even today (Mason 321). Even if she has never read them, Katie Davis certainly follows the inherited example of Julian and Kempe, who "in the mystical tradition of personal dialogue with a divine being who is Creator, Father, and Lover, discover and reveal themselves in discovering and revealing the Other" (Mason, 321). Throughout *Kisses from Katie,* Davis foregrounds her relationship with God to discuss and justify her humanitarian work, and her experience as a woman serving abroad.

Davis is undeniably writing for those who share her faith and support her work in Uganda. But she also anticipates and addresses possible criticism from those within and outside her Christian community. She responds directly to those who feel that a young, single woman should not be in such a dangerous place, or exercise such an authority over others. She also seems to be aware of the kind of reception her autobiography will receive from those who disapprove of missionary work, and of Christianity in general. By creating and assuming leadership of her own organization, by sharing her faith, and by becoming a mother to many young girls while basically still one herself, without a husband or patriarchal figure present to guide or discipline her, Davis, for all her devotion to God, still subverts the traditional and

valued role of a woman within the Christianity of her home and family. Barbara J. MacHaffie calls this standard for Christian females the "cult of true womanhood" (159), with the word "cult" referring to the sacredness of the idea at the time. Within this tradition, "the ideal American woman was described as submissive, morally pure, and pious. She found power and happiness at home in the role of wife and mother, and judged herself as well as other women according to these qualities" (159). Traditionally, then, women within Christianity were valued most for their roles as wives or mothers (MacHaffie, 14), and little emphasis was placed on a single woman carrying out her Christian duties until she occupied one, or ideally both, of these roles—and in the right order.

For this reason, within the history of Christian missions, women typically did not participate unless they were married. Or as MacHaffie puts it, "If a woman in the early nineteenth century felt called to devote her life to 'spreading light where there was darkness,' her only option was to marry a missionary and go overseas as his wife" (172). Although it became more common for single woman to go abroad, the Christian community was often still hesitant. "The mission boards generally feared criticism and even they were uncertain as to whether or not women could carry out their tasks without the strong guidance and protection of a husband," MacHaffie reports. In addition, "Missionary wives suspected them of being 'husband hunters' and the missionaries themselves were reluctant to give the women authority or responsibility" (173). For these reasons, the act of a single young woman moving overseas for mission work was, and to some degree still is, uncommon with in Christian tradition.

Katie is married now, but at the start of her mission work, and when she was writing her blog and her memoir, she was acting alone. She therefore feels the need to address directly why she seems so committed to subverting the traditions of Christian "true womanhood." She begins

by stating this has never been her intention. She reveals that when she first left America for Uganda, she has a serious boyfriend (6). They remained a long-distance couple during her first year abroad, but it eventually became clear that they did not share a desire to be in Uganda. Davis therefore breaks off the relationship not because her desire to serve in Uganda is stronger than her love for him, but because above all as a Christian, she must follow what she feels God has called her to do. Similarly, she explains to critics within her Christian community who disagree with her working as a single woman in Uganda that it is her faith, and her certainty that her missionary activity is God's calling, that require her to serve. Davis recognizes that she is not apparently following in the tradition of "true womanhood," serving God through a devotion to family, or carrying out missionary work only alongside a husband. Her decision to break up with her boyfriend is however part of a necessary process of separating herself from relying on any person, male or female, for strength and comfort, because of the overriding need to carry out God's will.

She knows that fulfilling this need may seem to be a rebellion against the heavily patriarchal passages in The Bible, which are often interpreted within her community as expressing God's will that women should be subordinate to and dependent upon male figures in their lives (14). But when the choice becomes Uganda or her boyfriend, Davis claims that God actually made the decision for her" "Nothing was more difficult, more grueling, more heartbreaking than the moment He [God] asked me to give up one of the most important things in my life" (227), Katie recalls. She was therefore not asking for divine approval, but answering a divine request, when she undertook her mission as a single women. It is a difficult decision for Davis, but she makes it clear that her intent and duty is to honor God's will:

> I want to forsake everything to remain in the center of God's will for my life, that I want to give up everything for the sake of the Gospel. I believe with all of my heart that nothing is a sacrifice in light of the promise that one day I will get to live with Him forever. (231)

Because Davis is certain that it was God's will for her to move to Uganda as a young woman, and then break up with her boyfriend when he refuses to accept this, to have conformed to the ideals of "true womanhood" would have meant to disobey a direct command from God, something that those in her Christian community would have to agree would be more sinful and egregious than rebelling against Church traditions regarding the role of women.

Davis also responds to those who may say that her actions as a "mother" does not fall within the lines of God's will for her as a woman. Motherhood is strongly emphasized, and even glorified, within Christian tradition (MacHaffie, 161). The assumption, however, is that a mother has biological children, which would again mean that she would be married, since sex is restricted to couples within Christian tradition and doctrine. Davis circumvents these beliefs. She becomes a mother by following an unconventional path, adopting all of her many children without being married. She herself calls her family "unconventional," but like her commitment to missionary work as a single woman, she is certain that her entry into adoptive motherhood does not break the rules of her faith, because God has singled her out for this task.

Davis provocatively describes herself as a "single mom"—a term that usually does not refer to her situation—and recognizes that her role as a mother to thirteen foster daughters while still a very young woman does not conform to typical understandings of Christian motherhood. What she insists upon, however, is that the challenges of her atypical motherhood push her to rely on God more, who called her to do this, and therefore increase her faith in Him. "If being a

new mother taught me anything," she writes, "it was just how inadequate I truly am and just how dependent I am on my Father to give me the strength and grace for each day" (108). Even more compellingly, she compares her circumstances to those of Mary, the mother of Jesus, another single girl whom became a mother because God called upon her. "When I thought about Mary," Davis recalls, "I decided not to strive to be a perfect mother but to simply endeavor to be like she was—completely unprepared but ready to take the child God handed to her" (109). Like Davis, Mary became a mother by unconventional means, but persisted in trusting God. By citing Mary, the revered and dutiful mother of Jesus, as an example, Davis is also responding to critics who may disapprove of her thirteen foster daughters by pointing out that God has in the past required young women to become mothers without any human help. But Davis also insists that her motherhood conforms to the values of her faith community. She has assumed the role that women are traditionally supposed to play; God just required her to assume it in a different way.

Davis also explains in her memoir how she found herself taking on the responsibilities of parenthood without the support of a husband. To begin with, she never expected for this to happen: "I never meant to be a mother . . . . Not before I was married. Not when I was nineteen. Not to so, so many little people" (xvii). Nor did she anticipate that she would only be able to meet her responsibility to God as a missionary if she became a mother. She arrived in Uganda determined to care of the people and share her faith. But after she begins taking in children who have no parents or relatives able to care for them, she soon realizes that within this society, permanent adoption is the only way, and therefore the necessary way, that she can insure their health and safety. And when she realized this, she "believed that the Lord was confirming that these were the next steps He wanted me to take, so I eagerly began the process that would one day lead me to finalize the adoptions of my new children" (61). Although Davis has established

Amazima as non-profit support organization dedicated to caring for Ugandan children, she also believes that she was called by God to expand her ministry into her personal life, requiring her to take care of the children in a maternal way. Once sure of this path, she found herself becoming an adoptive parent to more and more children who had no other place to go as specific needs arose. She attributes her success in carrying out this unconventional task not only to God's command, but also to His constant help as she has grown into this role.

Uganda and Christianity

Katie Davis' story of her missionary work in Uganda is also potentially problematic and controversial because recently many commentators have criticized Christian missionaries and advisors in Uganda for their close involvement with controversial policies. To understand the context of the activities Katie describes in *Kisses from Katie*, it is important to know something about the history of Uganda, and in particular, its religious history. Protestant Christianity came to Uganda—called Buganda at the time—in 1877, but a mere twenty-five years later it had become "one of the most successful mission fields in the whole of Africa" (Ward, n.p.). Islam and Catholicism were already present, and the three religions competed, at times violently, for dominion within Buganda. When Protestant Christians were martyred in 1885 and 1886, it not only spurred missionary activity, but also led to foreign military intervention to "safeguard the future of Christianity" (Ward, n.p.). During this period, the successes of these missions were therefore directly related to their connections to military and political power. Those Baganda, or native people of Buganda, who embraced this form of Christianity therefore became "sub-imperialists," gaining political power through British colonization.

People therefore often criticized missionary education as a tool of imperialism, and certainly "many of the evangelists shared the arrogance and domineering tendencies" of the

political leaders, and the British imperial agents. But there were also many dedicated missionaries who received little if any political or financial rewards from their work (Ward, n.p.), and the government and these individuals often developed close relationships because these missionaries provided education that the government wanted for its people. These actions took place on a small scale. Like the school Katie Davis eventually set up, "the heart of the mission education system continued to be the village school . . . " (Ward, n.p.).

When Uganda became independent, those who came to power were mostly Protestants, who had been educated in such mission schools. While some Evangelical churches attempted to distance themselves from political ties, the Church of Uganda (or Anglican Church) had a significant impact on a variety of matters following the years after independence. And although some churches continue to resist potentially embarrassing political affiliations, the tie between religion and politics remains strong today.

During continuing turmoil after Uganda's independence, many American Christian missionaries have provided relief aid and literacy programs that the people's own government cannot afford (O'Hehir, n.p.). Very recently, however, many commentators have criticized Evangelical Christians in Uganda for using their government influence to promote right-wing agendas; most notably, the banning and subsequent punishment of homosexuality. Because of the financial and educational contributions, the amount of influence American fundamentalists have is significant. Critics observe that the proposed highly punitive gay-rights legislation stems largely from the evangelical community, including Uganda-born pastors trained in the United States (Kaoma, n.p.). Even more drastic has been the advocacy of the death penalty for homosexuality, a movement led by American minister Scott Lively. Though often considered an extreme fanatic by many in the larger Christian community, Lively has influenced both Ugandan

politicians and pastors (Kaoma, n.p.), and in 2014 President Yoweri Museveni signed an "anti-gay" bill that mandates life in prison for "aggravated homosexuality," and jail time for those who reach out to the LGBT community. Although this bill first surfaced in 2009, two years before *Kisses from Katie* was published (Karimi and Thompson, n.p.), and although homosexual acts were already illegal in Uganda stretching back to the time of British rule (Lavers, n.p.), critics of Christian missionaries in Uganda accuse them of overstepping their boundaries, and using their political weight to promote an cruel and unjust agenda.

In *Kisses with Katie*, Katie Davis's responds to those concerned about hidden political and moral agendas lying behind Christian mission work in Uganda by insisting on her independence from such movements, largely by emphasizing her guileless devotion to the kindest aspects of her Christian faith. She declares that she operates her mission without church support or political involvement. Her only purpose when she arrived in Uganda was to share her faith. Once there, she realized that the best way of demonstrating the love of Jesus for impoverished people was by meeting practical needs.

In *Kisses from Katie*, this is the motivation she identifies for creating her independent non-profit organization, Amazima Ministries. When realizes that most children in her village in Uganda don't go to school because they can't afford to, she does not appeal to the government, or to the institutional church in Uganda or America. Instead, she sets up a program for children to be sponsored by people back in the United States. Though still devoted to sharing her faith by demonstrating the love of Christ, she realized that she could only do this with the help of a non-profit to support her efforts to respond to the poverty in her community in Uganda. "I didn't believe it was possible to tell a child about the love of Christ without simultaneously showing her that love by feeding her, clothing her, inviting her in" (84), Davis concluded, and Amazima

became the means for first providing children with the necessities for their survival and education so that one day they will not only be able to provide for themselves, but value and practice the faith that made their own success possible.

This plan not only suggests that she has no hidden agenda for being in Uganda, but that she has no desire to be involved in anything beyond a local level. Davis also makes it very clear that she is there entirely out of her own volition, and is not operating to advance any organization's or community's political or ethical agenda. She does this by documenting the initial lack of support she received for her mission from those closest to her. Katie describes how she had to struggle against the pushback from her own parents even to get to Uganda. When she tells them that she wants to spend a year after high school doing mission work, they immediately object. They want Katie to go to college and have a career that will allow her to live a secure life. But largely due to her persistence and passion for the people of Uganda, they eventually give in: "Though many of my friends and much of my family did not understand my desire to be so far away for so long, no one could dampen my enthusiasm" (5). That her own parents keep her from going to Uganda shows that while her Christian beliefs have a huge impact on her life, she is hardly an agent for American fundamentalist Christianity. She serves no political or ideological agenda, let alone a firm commitment to persecuting homosexuals. Her personal desire to share her faith with those abroad is her only motive.

Similarly, when David decides to remain in Uganda, it not because of the influence or orders of others, or because of her sense of obligation to her sect, but because of desire to do what God was telling her to do: to serve the most vulnerable in the community. She also insists that her decision is entirely personal: "I believe that God is in control, yes, but I also believe I have a choice: I can follow Him or I turn my back on Him. . . . I can go to the hard places or I

can remain comfortable. And if I remain comfortable, God who loves us unconditionally will continue to love me anyway. I may still see His glory revealed in my life and recognize His blessings, but not like I could have" (134). Her commitment to "the hard places" also keeps her from giving much thought to a political or national agenda. Living in impoverished Uganda is a challenge. While not a country explicitly closed to missionaries, such as China and North Korea, Uganda is dangerous for foreign evangelists. Working in that environment carries the risk of contracting fatal diseases not common back in the United States. There is always social unrest, and a rocky political climate. By choosing to go there for her mission work, Davis faces head-on the problems of such a dangerous and unsettled country. That is enough, without trying to become a political player.

Further, Davis purposefully does not stress conversion to Christianity, or how she gets her children or other Ugandans to adopt her set of beliefs. Her goal is not to make these people follow what she believes to be true, or what she practices every day. Instead, she wants to *share* her own love, so that they can eventually experience the love of Christ that she feels. Speaking of one of her daughters, Davis explains that "Once she can understand and see my love, I can begin to tell her about a Savior who loves her even more . . . . The truth is that He loves these children just as much as He loves me and now that I know, I am responsible" (92).

Adopting so many children, and even starting up her non-profit, are therefore independent actions, borne out of a sense of personal responsibility to offer love and care above all to the people of Uganda. And in that sense, her memoir is also an appeal for financial support. By foregrounding her own faith and love as the reason for starting Amazima Ministries to sustain her relief work in Uganda, Davis not only responds to skeptics who believe she has a political agenda, but appeals to those in her own Christian community. Part of the mission of her

nonprofit is “to help children experience the truth of a bigger, brighter world available to them through education and, more important, the truth of a God who created them beautifully in His image, a God who loves and values and wants the best for them” (84). Just as Malala stresses those parts of Islam that strengthened her, throughout *Kisses from Katie*, Davis is constantly citing Bible verses, making allusions to Bible stories, and inserting short personal testimonies and journal entries about how God has sustained her during her time as a missionary in Uganda. And also like Malala, she provides these materials to demonstrate her trustworthiness as someone whom potential funders would want to support.

Fundraising for her personal ministry is also one of the reasons why she places such a strong emphasis on faith. In *Kisses from Katie*, Davis mentions returning to America to seek support for her work in Uganda. Her appeals are for funders who will help her carry out her own specific agendas; she does not work for any other organization, and therefore cannot be required to carry out its goals. Spreading the word of God’s love through her own love and care is her mission, and it is made possible through individuals who support this cause. As a result, her appeal is personal—through her blog at first, and then through her memoir. By showing what she does, and what she believes, Davis appeals to donors who share her understanding of Christian faith, and her belief in how best to address the poverty in Uganda.

Conclusion

Katie Davis wields her strong beliefs in response to her supporters and her critics in and out of her Christian community. To critics of Christian missionaries and outside political agents, she shows that she has no larger agenda by insisting that she only seeks to share her faith through providing basic needs and education for those in Uganda, and then describes in detail how she does that by adopting children, and caring for anyone in need that she can. In her detailed

accounts of her activities, she never mentions involvement in any national or local legislation, nor does she describe herself as indoctrinating her own children with any specific beliefs other than confidence in the love of Jesus. Within her own faith community, Davis responds to critics who believe that she is not fulfilling her principal duty as a woman: to live a pious and subordinate domestic life as a wife and mother, in keeping with the traditional "cult of true motherhood." She does this by retelling the story of her independent travel to Uganda, of her becoming a different kind of mother who meet extreme needs through adoption, of her starting up her own nonprofit Azalama ministries, and of doing all of this without a husband or other patriarchal figure present, yet crediting her success to her complete subordination to God, the ultimate male authority figure.

Whether critics, potential donors, or readers accept this argument or not, Davis's faith is the key to her denial that her mission work in Uganda is anything other than her obedience to the commands of God. *Kisses from Katie* is the story of how she responded to God's unambiguous call to go to Uganda to share His love primarily by providing basic necessities and education for the children in her village near the city of Jinja, and by adopting them if necessary to insure they get both. For this reason, her memoir alternates between personal testimony and references to Bible passages that stress how important it is for Christians to share the love of God. Furthermore, this emphasis on faith, rather than on any of the many systemic political, cultural, and economic challenges of daily life in Uganda, also offers hints as to why she was even allowed to work there as a young, white, single (at the time) woman. Because she avoids any discussion of controversial topics, such as homosexuality, she implicitly argues that such concerns do not influence her fundamental mission of sharing her faith with the people, and conversely, she receives no favors from those in power in Uganda, or those Christian

communities that are trying to shape national policy. She is an unusual case—a girl who manages to navigate a volatile and dangerous country with her faith as her only supposed guide, even as she pragmatically finds the resources necessary to carry out her mission work in her roles of teacher, mother, missionary, head of a non-profit, and young woman.

Conclusion

While Lena Dunham's, Malala Yousafzai's, and Katie Davis's memoirs demonstrate that they each live out their beliefs in contrasting ways, the purpose behind their writing is the same. Each seeks to respond to critics, and reaffirm her right, as well as the rights of other women, to act in ways deemed inappropriate or unconventional. Each woman's work also displays her ability not only to defy societal standards placed on women in her community, but to insist that she remains firm and consistent in her fundamental beliefs, and to defend them, even to her supporters.

In *Not That Kind of Girl*, Lena Dunham does not back down from her overt and oftentimes offensive commitment to what she understands to be an authentic representation of herself as a woman. Her memoir focuses on the many experiences in her life when she has been criticized or insulted, such as with her nude scenes on *Girls*, or with the condescension she's frequently faced from men in the entertainment industry. Showing her awareness of the divisive nature of her career, she responds to those who claim that her work is advocating for women, and those who believe that it demeans them. Throughout *Not That Kind of Girl*, she never apologizes for her actions that may seem offensive or inappropriate, but reiterates the necessity and value of authentic stories by women.

Malala Yousafzai uses *I Am Malala* to defy the single story narrative of the oppressed Muslim woman often ascribed to her by the Western world. While many details in her memoir seem to support this notion, she clearly rejects the belief that women within Islam have no agency or value within the Muslim community. Instead, she gives examples of both supportive men and freethinking women within Islam, always while advocating for education. Malala also insists on the positive role her Muslim faith has played in her life, before and after her shooting.

She remains firm in her religious beliefs, despite being attacked in the supposed name of the same faith. Malala consciously invokes the stereotype ascribed to women within her community to spread awareness of the realities of her culture and religion, as well as to spread her advocacy for education.

Katie Davis' *Kisses from Katie* is the most overtly spiritual of the three memoirs, as Davis constantly turns to her personal religious beliefs to both affirm and defend her missionary work. In her memoir, Davis describes how her spiritual devotion essentially makes her life decisions, including the choice to move to Uganda, which was the start of her nonprofit work. Davis preemptively addresses her critics and supporters by emphasizing her faith on every page, using it to defend and account for her unusual work as a single woman missionary to the dangerous country of Uganda, and as a single foster mother to thirteen children.

Though it may offend some, none of the work these women do harms others. The amount of backlash experienced by the three authors, as personal attacks or as strong objections to their beliefs, is clearly disproportionate to any "injury" they may cause through their actions. Moreover, a sizable portion of these attacks would not occur if these women were men. As a result, in each memoir the women are not only defending themselves for their decisions and actions, but consciously defending their right to make them or do them as women.

Each of these memoirs was written by contemporary, young, celebrity women who occupy very different places on the social and cultural spectrum. Yet these women all display the same belief in themselves and in the purpose of their work that enables them to withstand criticism, and to continue living their lives as anomalies. I would argue, therefore, that their memoirs not only engage with their supporters and naysayers, but also stand as statements and demonstrations of faith—in some cases faith in a higher power, but for all three faith in their

ability to carry out as women the work they believe in so strongly, and that has made them controversial and famous.

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